

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

Joint Meeting of the School Committee and City Council

East Providence City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue – Council Chamber

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

October 21, 2015

Open Meeting

Meeting Called to Order at 6:30PM.

City Council Members Present: Mayor Rose, Tracy Capobianco, Timothy Conley, Helder Cunha, Robert Britto, City Manager, Mr. Richard Kirby, City Solicitor, and Timothy Chapman.

School Committee Members Present: Anthony Ferreira, Jessica Beauchaine, Charles Tsonos, Andrew Thomas, Esq. Robert Silva, Esq.

Salute to the Flag

New Business

City Manager, Mr. Kirby, spoke about having a working relationship with the City Council and School Committee; he suggested that each

take moment to express what they expect from a meeting like this.

Both Mr. Tsonos and Mayor Rose stated they would like to work on having a better city for all and that schools are important to the city; we need to focus on the city over time; what is going on in schools and how that impacts the city.

Plan and Coordination to Address Issues and Plans of the School Department and School Department as it Effects Economic Development

Mr. Tsonos stated there are many issues; he asked to put on the table what the projects are to repair the infrastructure so that the City Manager and City Council can understand what the issues are.

Mr. Ferreira – means a lot to the community; walked through four elementary schools; some issues:

#1 is to bring staff up to par regarding qualifications; 4-5 people; millions of dollars of work; problem is no maintenance program; 10-15 year life span; we need to employ more of the right individuals; school needs are great and we need to do the right thing for 5600 students and approximately 800 employees; we need to keep the city going forward with our new City Manager; hold quarterly meetings or meet whenever we see fit.

Mr. Tsonos – maintenance saves us money; Mr. Ferreira reminds us about that constantly.

Ms. Beauchaine – Mr. Ferreira talks about facilities; we have 800 teachers not including Teacher Assistants, administrators, custodial and maintenance workers and we need to maintain that. Need to review the issue with teacher salaries in order to keep them here and

be able to recruit teachers to come to East Providence; in the eighth year we lose them; need to push for salaries to go up like other districts; it is upsetting to see good teachers leave for more money elsewhere; we need to look at how we can promote our schools, which should be our shining star; people come to a community for that; people doing research on how to bring more people into East Providence; there are still many foreclosures; all need to be behind promoting schools and teachers; volunteers doing great things; we need to invest in our schools.

Mayor Rose – Mr. Cunha has been working on the boarded up houses; City Council has been working on some things and schools working on others.

Ms. Beauchaine – we have to find a way to do better; numbers dropped; Kettle Point coming in; Waddington has 500 + students in the building with walk-ins every day; 25-26 students in classrooms; do we need additions or portable classrooms.

Discussion regarding salary teacher salaries and step levels and how they compare to other RI communities.

Mr. Kirby stated that the group should define dates; get demographics; set up a salary review with detail on steps; 42% dedicated to School Department; need to get an analysis; how can we be more competitive; review graduation rates; facilities issues; set an agenda for items the City Council and School Committee want to delve into.

Mr. Tsonos – plan and coordinate; look for future meetings; City Council and School Committee in small groups to discuss issues as

they arise; plan an agenda for next meeting.

Mayor Rose – need a liaison; set up quarterly meetings; need to know more about these issues; we do not have knowledge about economic development on the school end; Kettle Point; Village Green; do not see people moving out, nor do not have statistics on that.

Mr. Conley – elementary schools are tight; there is some space in the Middle Schools; he does not think the issues are that complicated; we are spending less on schools than on city; have been dealing with crisis management; state wanted to shut down the high school which is 60 years old; is it worth ten million or should we build a new high school; the list does not ever address what is needed; only 43% funded; 56% in other places; why are we making those choices; need to look at data for more strategic decisions.

Mr. Tsonos – worked with the City Manager to address infrastructure problems; it is the City Council's right to manage money; the School Department is responsible to track and let the City Council and the City manager know where it is going; state money in the news; RIDE matches money; let the City Council know; discussed at monthly Facilities Meetings where we address issues on a spreadsheet with projections for addressing priorities.

May Rose – perhaps a member of the City Council should attend those meetings to be able to inform the City Council about those issues.

Mr. Kirby stated this is the genesis of a strategy session; quality of life, economic development sense, facilities, quality of education; standards of achievement/performance; teachers salaries, budget

process; next year we will be working together for the complete budget and we can address school needs as best we can; will take years to move back.

Mr. Ferreira disagreed with some of the comments that these are issues and concerns that have been there right along, meeting after meeting, and that the only thing talked about was a door project which was going well. Concerns with temperatures in our buildings, handicap ramps, sidewalk issues; same information over and over. He goes out to schools and finds ventilation systems that have not been cleaned for possibly 10-20 years, which we discuss at facilities meetings about how we need to spend \$30-40,000 to start to clean them; we need to assign someone to get quotes to discuss; he did not want to debate this any longer; we have to try to find the money; sidewalks are a hazard and nothing has been done about it.

Mr. Cunha – why has School Committee not done anything to get quotes and then figure out an allocation and prioritize; wanted an H/R Department and prioritized that; project manager should get quotes to justify needed.

Mayor Rose –just get an RFP and vote on it; done, instead of discussing it.

Mr. Ferreira said he did not see the list of projects that went to the City Council; how can we get involved if we do not know.

Tracy Capobianco – trusted the Superintendent on priorities; that's why she voted for the money.

Mayor Rose – RFP proposals, done and move forward; get quarterly meetings so not to get bogged down; like us, school department has

to do the same.

Mr. Tsonos – all agree to meet quarterly especially before budget time.

Ms. Beauchaine– three years ago the high school was almost unaccredited because of the building; list was made of most important items by the Superintendent; fire alarm; vents; only given 4-5 priority items; little money; no priority; fire alarms, doors; heat or no heat; do we want books; until we change 42% to a little higher, to make it more attractive; we need to find a way.

Mr. Britto - interior, fire alarms; electrician on staff; rainy day fund is \$3.2 million; can we identify these issues and use \$1 million to take care of some of these concerns so not in a position of discredit at high school; heating issues, need to address in spring, fall too late; need to be more proactive; spend time looking at important items; plan 8-12 months; plumbers on staff; what has been taken care of.

Mayor Rose – need to finish repair projects, unless an emergency

Mayor Britto – need to check off; this is what we do in construction.

Mr. Feola – plumber for city and schools; electrician; had an emergency today at the police station; we work on both when needed; happens all day – fire; library; schools; we work together and prioritize; technology needs 50 drops-can we do it; fire alarm replacing; Fire Department inspected our buildings; we reviewed 83 violations; need sprinkler at High School which will take away all of those violations, new doors, closures; Whiteknact new Fire alarm; Riverside – corridors all glass and need to be ripped out or sprinkler put in; we have done places of assembly.

Mr. Britto – should go out to bid; instead of five custodians; hire plumber/trade people.

Mr. Feola – custodians needed to clean buildings; we are filling vacancies

Mr. Britto – rainy day money - could designate \$1 million; electrical and mechanical out to bid.

Mr. Feola – looked at Fire Department report and prioritized; Hennessey; Whiteknact wanted to connect alarm and sprinkler at same time.

Mr. Britto – looking for quotes; should start working on this now instead of 11th hour

Mr. Conley – previous manager level funded the School Department; discussion regarding rainy day fund

Mr. Kirby explained – need to meet debt service first.

Ms. Beauchaine – we do go out to bid, but how do we pay for it; rainy day fund created by taxpayers; why not fix one big deficiency

Mr. Britto – 48% reimbursement – life safety projects

Mr. Feola – has to be in \$10 million plan (only 50% of line item - explained reimbursement process; RIDE regulations are if you do not complete project, wipes out the category

Mr. Cunha – fix plumbing; how are the walls

Mr. Feola – 1950's not designed for now; sub- basement; pipes.

Mayor Rose – set up a committee for evaluation of professionals that have to give us estimate of what needs to be done above and beyond; next City Council meeting; go to our reps and senators

Mr. Cunha – would like to see high school near Pierce Field; use other

for commercial

Mr. Ferreira – as a taxpayer, the Career/Technical Center is a jewel; how do you move the High School; have to refurbish the high school; \$1.4 million put into the pool and then we closed it (accountability); how about evaluating it before; we have to do a much better job with every dollar; we know what has happened in the past.

Mayor Rose - \$806,000 – done by August next year; School Committee needs to make sure it gets done; stay on top of it; we know you get frustrated.

Mr. Ferreira – need plan for a High School; need to start tomorrow.

Mayor Rose – that's why talking about a real evaluation; then \$70 million; go to federal delegation; this is a start; focus on our end and you on your end; will figure out how to move forward with this; we can focus on that.

Mr. Feola – all invited to see the schools

Mr. Kirby – we have a committee; form joint subcommittee to investigate schools; City Manager, Asst. Supt. our Facilities person; about five weeks to come back to report on where the high school is at; professional analysis; maybe hire outside expert whether to keep high school or not; itemize priorities in high school.

Tracy Capobianco – aware success related to competitive school system is key to the city; last week two members of both City Council and School Committee discussed priorities of \$806,000; tax increase; that was what they had at that time

Ms. Beauchaine - Discussion about the \$806,000; is addition extra; already established and \$550 additional money of \$2 million we asked

for

Tracy Capobianco – \$250,000 moved to the School Department.

Future Sessions between the City and School Committee:

Mayor Rose – two on subcommittee of City Council and School Committee members; four people with the City Manager to look at it; hire a professional if needed; work on it and make a report.

Mayor Britto – look for solutions; not hash it over; we only have so much money.

Discussion regarding school department substitute custodians and hiring five custodians;

Mayor Rose – will hold quarterly meetings; start with one project; two from City Council and two from School Committee by November; each side will report on it.

Mr. Tsonos and Mayor Rose settled on quarterly meetings; next on January 11, 2016 at 6:30PM.

Ms. Beauchaine – teacher negotiations in 2017; need to look forward on where we need to be in spring; would like to know where we are.

Mr. Tsonos thanked school administrators for attending.

Motion to adjourn by Mr. Conley, seconded by Mr. Britto.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Nathan Cahoon, Clerk of the Committee